DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 099 722 CG 009 314

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TITLE	A Study of Attribution Techniques in the Interview.
INSTITUTION	Minnesota Univ., Minneapolis. Office for Student Affairs.
PUB DATE	Jul 74
NOTE	25p.; Volume 15, No. 2
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.75 HC-$1.85 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS	Behavioral Science Research; *Behavior Change; *Change Strategies; *Counseling Effectiveness; *Counselor Qualifications; *Interpersonal Relationship; Predictive Measurement; Research Projects

ABSTRACT

A counseling analogue study was conducted to determine the effectiveness of a method for changing clients' self-perceptions in an interview. Based on causal attribution theory, an interview procedure was designed to systematically control behavioral information assumed to be utilized by individuals in inductively arriving at views of their personal characteristics. It was hypothesized that greater acceptance of an interviewer's inference about an interviewee's personal characteristics will occur when (1) the inference is based on normatively deviant action rather than when it is based on normatively average action, and (2) the inference is based on a review of several consistent actions rather than when it is based on an analysis of a single action. The hypotheses were tested by examining changes in self-ratings of assertiveness by 60 college males. Subjects' ratings were made immediately before and after a simulated counseling interview which focused on an analysis of each subject's actions in an arranged social conflict situation. Results indicated that an inference based on a single action was highly persuasive (p=.002); neither the perception of deviancy nor of consistency of performance significantly added to acceptance of the inference. (Author)

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A STUDY OF ATTRIBUTION TECHNIQUES IN THE INTERVIEW

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How can a client's self-perceptions be altered in an interview? Several experimental studies of interview processes have shown that an expert, attractive interviewer can produce short-term change in an interviewee's self-view by forcefully expressing an opinion about the client's personal characteristics, with only a minimal attempt to explain the rationale for that opinion. (Schmidt and Strong, 1970; Strong and Schmidt, 1970; Strong and Dixon, 1971).

While providing convincing reasons for a conclusion does not appear to be essential for change, other interpersonal influence studies suggest that a strong informational rationale deepens and stabilizes induced attitude changes (Kelman and Havland, 1953; Strong and Gray, 1972, Strong and Schmidt, 1970). Thus a superior approach to changing client self-perceptions in an interview may be to control the information the client uses to make inferences about his personal characteristics. A logical basis for the development of such an informational control approach is current theory concerning the ways in which individuals process experiential information to determine their self-perceptions. One attempt to specify the processes in the development of self-knowledge is causal attribution theory (Heider, 1965; Jones and Davis, 1965; Kelley, 1967, Strong, 1970).

Strong (1970) discussed attribution theory in terms of how an individual makes inferences about the personal causes of his own behavior. The basic assumption of this analysis is that people inductively infer their personal characteristics by observing and analyzing their overt behavior (Bem, 1967). Strong proposed that an interviewer can change a client's self-view by controlling

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the behavioral information utilized in the inductive reasoning process. A proposed interview method for achieving such informational control was termed "persuasive instruction", after Kelley (1967).

The first step in persuasive instruction is to induce an internal or personal causal attribution of a behavior which is inconsistent with a present, inappropriate self-perception. For example, a client who believed he was incompetent would be induced first to produce an example of successful performance from his experience and then to attribute that performance to personal causes such as effort or ability, rather than to external causes such as luck or task ease. Based on hypotheses by Heider (1965) and Kelley (1967), Strong asserted that clients will attribute their actions to personal causes only if these actions are seen as different from the actions of other people in similar circumstances. Thus an individual will attribute a successful performance to personal factors only if he believes that other people fail at the task. If all individuals perform equally well, then performance says little about the personal characteristics of any one individual. If an interviewer does not convince his client that a given action is normatively atypical then the client will not use that action to determine his self-concept.

Once a client is induced to see a target action as personally caused, the next step in persuasive instruction is to control the client's inference of the personal characteristic which is responsible for the action. Strong suggested that such control can be achieved by demonstrating that the target action had unique consequences which could be accounted for by only one explanation. The interviewer establishes the uniqueness of the consequences of the target action by contrasting them with the consequences of alternative actions available to the client. For example, if an interviewer wished a client to attribute an instance of successful performance to high achievement motivation,

he would suggest that the client could have chosen to take several alternative actions, all of which would have resulted in failure. The interviewer then points out that the only inference which can adequately account for the choice to perform successfully is high achievement motivation.

The final step in the persuasive instruction method is to show that the inferred target characteristic applies to a wide range of behavior and not just the target example. It is assumed that a client will be more likely to see himself as having the characteristic if he believes that the characteristic consistently explains a wide range of important instances of his behavior. The interview technique for increasing the generalizability of the inferred characteristic is to guide the client in a review of past experiences, eliciting a number of examples of target behavior and pointing out the consistency with which these behaviors were performed. The greater the number of behaviors supporting the target characteristic, the more convincing the attribution becomes.

The purpose of this study is to examine the effectiveness of the persuasive instruction method. The following hypotheses were tested: (1) Greater acceptance of an inference about an interviewee's personal characteristics will occur if the inference is based on normatively atypical action than if it is based on normatively typical action. (2) Greater acceptance of an inference about an interviewee's personal characteristics will occur if the inference is supported by a guided review of several past actions than if the inference is not supported by a guided review.

Method

The hypotheses were tested in a two-stage experiment. First, subjects experienced an event which appeared to be incidental to the experiment. Then the subjects' reactions to the "incidental event" were used as the content of an interview. In this way, the subjects' experiences and reactions discussed

in the interview were standardized. Independent variables of "normative information", "inference" and "review" were manipulated by constructing interview scripts or "modules" for each level of each variable, which were then combined to form the experimental conditions presented in the interviews. Two levels of the "normative information" variable were "average" (the individual's reaction was presented as being the same as everyone else's) and "deviant" (the individual's reaction was presented as being highly atypical). Two levels of the inference variable were "low assertive" (the individual's action was interpreted as indicating low assertion) or "non-specific" (no interpretation was given for the individual's actions). The review of past experiences was either "guided" where the interviewer actively sought to find other incidences of low assertiveness in the individual's past actions, or "unguided" where the individual reviewed his past actions without the presence of the interviewer. The two levels of the normative information and the inference variables were crossed to create four experimental conditions all with non-guided review of past events. A fifth condition was created by combining "deviant", "low assertive" and "guided review" and its effects were analyzed by comparing them to the effects of the "deviant", "low assertive" "non-guided review" condition.

Subjects

Subjects were 60 male volunteers from an introductory psychology course in the College of Liberal Arts, University of Minnesota, who received points for their participation which applied to their course grade. Ages ranged from 18 to 35 years, with a median age of 20 years. Seventy-two percent were sophomores.

Procedure

Students were telephoned and asked whether they would like to participate in a study of the "relationship between peoples' life experiences and the way they looked at themselves." If they agreed to do so, they were told that

the relationships between experiences and personality would be explored in an interview and in psychological tests, in two sessions. They were then told, "We are well into the study", and given a number of times to choose from for their first session.

When the student arrived for his first session, the receptionist told him that his interviewer would be about 20 minutes late. The student was shown to the interviewer's office and asked to wait. On the desk and shelves of the office were props designed to enhance the interviewer's perceived expertise: his bound Ph.D. thesis and a letter from a psychology journal informing him of the acceptance of a manuscript.

Incidental Event. Three minutes after the subject had been taken to the office, another student (a confederate of the experimenters) entered the room and said that the receptionist had told him that the student had some time before the interview, and asked the student if he would do him a favor. The confederate explained that he was nearly finished with his Masters thesis, but needed a few more students to take an intelligence scale so he could complete the thesis for his committee in time. He went on to explain that the scale was designed to measure intellectual capacity as well as utilization and thus contained a wide variety of questions (the test consisted of selected items from several intelligence and personality tests, and three personality rating scales including "assertiveness"). The confederate continued that if the student would take it, he would score the test and give the student the results after the research session. He finished by saying "I'd really appreciate it if you'd take it. I am really pressed right now to get it finished." He gave the student the instrument and said he would be back in 15 minutes to pick it up. All the students agreed to take the test.

Twelve minutes later, the receptionist burst into the room saying, "Dr._____is here. I have to have the test!" She grabbed the test from the subject and closed the door. The timing of the interruption was such that no student had finished the test completely, but all had finished over half of it including the "assertiveness" rating scale. Five minutes then elapsed between the removal of the test and the entry of the interviewer. During the five minutes, a research staff member assigned the student to one of 10 experimental conditions defined by the five interview conditions and two interviewers. Subjects were assigned on the basis of their initial rating of "assertiveness" such that (1) the conditions were equally represented in each two-day period of the experiment, and (2) the average initial ratings of "assertiveness" were approximately equal for each cell in each two-day period. Six students were assigned to each cell. Interviews were conducted over a ten-day period. A two-way analysis of variance of initial ratings yielded no significant differences among the five conditions or between interviews on the initial assertiveness ratings.

After the subject was assigned to one of the conditions, an Interview Guide was given to the interviewer on which the interview condition was specified. The Guide listed the interview events with spaces for interviewer notes beneath each, and served as a "prompt" sheet for the interviewer. One of the interviewers was a Ph.D. counseling psychologist, the other was an advanced graduate student in counseling psychology. They were trained extensively to portray the interviews as closely to the interview scripts as possible, and to obtain spontaneity. Throughout the interviews, the interviewers were warm and responsive to the student. All interviews were 45 minutes long, including a taping task control (the "unguided review").

Interview Structure. Five minutes after the receptionist took the test, the interviewer entered and introduced himself. After reviewing the stated purpose of the study, the interviewer inquired about the student's experiences in the last 20 minutes, being sure to obtain some account of the Masters student's request, and the receptionist's interruption. The interviewer then explained, "Now, this incident is a vital part of the study to provide a focus to our research. Quite obviously, it is not possible to explore all aspects of your personality in 45 minutes, so we're only looking at one thing. We hope to learn how you respond to interpersonal conflict generally, specifically in this instance of conflict. So, beginning with this incident, we want to identify the personality traits and critical incidents in your background accounting for your reactions. Do you follow what our purpose is then?" After the student indicated he understood, the interviewer handed him a sheet describing the tasks of the interview and reviewed them with the student. The tasks were: (1) Describe the incident and your reaction to it. (2) Explore why you reacted as you did. Look at what you intended to accomplish and what that means about your characteristics. (3) Explore other incidents of interpersonal conflict in your life, such as getting along with parents, friends, teachers, store clerks, and so on. Look at how you respond to these situations and explore why you respond as you do. After the student indicated he understood the tasks, the interviewer invited him to describe in some detail what he did, felt and thought during the incident, leading him through the following temporal order (this phase of the interview took about 20 minutes): (1) What were your thoughts about the study when you were called? (2) What were your thoughts when you reported for your interview? (3) How did you feel about being asked to wait? (4) What did you think when the M.A. student asked you to help him? (5) How did the test seem? (6) What was your reaction when the girl appeared and asked for your test? (7) How did you feel after she left? (8) As

you look at it now, why do you suppose you objected/gave in? That is, what did you intend to accomplish?

Experimental Conditions. Following the detailed description of the incident, the interviewer stated, "Well, that pretty well covers the incident, your reactions, and the meanings of your reaction. For the rest of the period, I would like you to work on the third thing on your list, exploring other incidents of interpersonal conflict. Just describe these incidents into the tape recorder. Just talk normally from where you are sitting and it will record fine. A research assistant will come in when the time is over and give you the personality measure we mentioned on the telephone, as well as a form for describing your reactions to the experiment. Okay, all set?" Stand, extend hand, shake hands, and say, "Thanks, (name) , for coming today and helping us out." The interviewer then left the room. The task of talking into the tape recorder comprised the "unguided review" condition.

"Deviant non-specific" Condition. Following the incident analysis, the interviewer said, "You know, (name) , your description of this incident has been very helpful to me in understanding its impact. Besides, I guess I feel like I'm getting to know you as a person. So I'd like to share with you some things we have learned from other students' reactions to this incident. I think these things will be helpful to you in thinking about the personal significance of your actions. You mentioned that you were quite surprised by the girl's asking for your test. You'll be interested to know that almost everyone has had similar feelings of surprise. I'd be interested to know why this might be - is it something about the girl? What do you think?" (Explore subject's response for a few moments, write down his remarks.)

"Another thing I think is very important is your final reaction. You see, ah...well...you're one of, uh, two students out of 40 some that Dr. and I have seen who actually gave the girl the test. The rest of the people

sort of hung in there and kept it one way or another. Most people worked something out - some that I've seen pointed out that they had given their word and wanted to do the Master's student a favor. Others emphasized their desire to get their results and finish waht they'd started. One guy even said,"that guy made me wait 20 minutes, he can wait five minutes for me!" I guess the point is that almost everyone did something to finish. Your reaction really sort of separates you from the other students - I'm wondering how you might explain this difference." The interviewer then explored the student's explanation for several minutes, pointing out other actions the student could have taken which would have allowed him to make sure that he did his favor and got his results, although at the risk of interpersonal conflict. After several minutes, the interviewer stated,"Well, that pretty well covers the incident, your reaction, and the meanings of your reaction", and introduced the unguided review condition as above.

"Average low-assertive" Condition. Following the incident analysis, the interviewer said, "You know, there are a number of traits which could account for your reaction - I'm thinking of politeness, disorganization, social reticence. I guess we have to keep in mind here all but two of the 40 some students Dr._____ and I have seen reacted pretty much the same way you did. Well, now, just in thinking about it, I'm wondering if this doesn't say something about your assertiveness and, for that matter, the other students' assertiveness." (Nod, get a short response). "Well, by assertiveness I mean, ah, like standing up for your own rights and desires - I guess, freely and forcefully expressing your feelings. Do you see what I'm getting at? - Well, you had a commitment, you had agreed to help that student out - You were somewhat involved in taking the test and wanted to get the results - So finishing was important to you. Just thinking about the situation, there were a number of

things you might have done to finish the test. You might have held on to it and tried to work something out with the girl. You could have asked for just a few more minutes to work on the test. Then you could have done the favor, and gotten your results. I had, after all, made you wait so you could have rightfully made me wait for a while. Instead, you (refer to notes) just, ah, meekly surrendered. You said you didn't make your feelings clear, you didn't calmly explore working it out so you could finish, you didn't hold true to your obligation, or to your own desire to finish. ___(Name)___ , instead you gave in easily, quickly, meekly. You hesitated, felt uneasy, even angry. But you didn't express yourself! You didn't act! You failed to assert yourself! This sure indicates low assertiveness to me. Does that make sense to you?" After response, "Well, I just have to stay with this assertive explanation" (write it down). The interviewer then stated, "Well, that pretty well covers the incident, your reaction and the meanings of your reaction," and introduced the student to the unguided review as above.

"Deviant low-assertive" Condition. Following the incident analysis, the interviewer said, "You know ___(Name)___, your description of this incident has been very helpful to me in understanding its impact," and continued as described in the "deviant non-specific" condition. Following the exploration of the student's explanation for his actions, the interviewer stated, "You know, there are a number of traits which could account for your reactions.." and continued as described in the "average low-assertive" condition, omitting, of course, the "average norm" sentences). Finally, the interviewer introduced the student to the unguided review and departed.

"Deviant low-assertive guided review" Condition. Following the incident analysis, the interview proceeded as described in the "deviant low-assertive" condition. However, instead of ending with the unguided review, he stated,

"Well, I think I've learned about all I can from examining the incident itself. Let's move on to the third task on your sheet - looking at other interpersonal conflict situations. I'm wondering if you can think of other incidents when you did not assert your feelings or stand up for your rights as much as you thought you should. Okay?" Pause, re-explain until subject agrees to continue. "Maybe I could give you an example of a situation with the potential for conflict and non-assertiveness. I know when I was an undergraduate, I would sometimes be studying the night before a test and a couple of friends would come down and want me to have a beer with them. If I said no, their feelings would be hurt, but if I went along,I would lose study time. Maybe something like that has happened to you?" The interviewer then guided the student's examination of non-assertive material, but being careful to cover assertive instances also. The analysis began with the student's current situation, and moved backwards in time, covering experiences in the classroom, with girlfriends and wife, friends, work, family, and impersonal events.

When the 45 minutes were up, the interviewer stated: "Well, we're out of time. Let me sum up. My purpose in talking to you was to explore the way you handle interpersonal conflicts, particularly the standard conflict incident here. From reviewing your rather unusual reaction to that incident and your other experiences, it looks as if you have often not spoken out - you often do not forcefully assert your rights and feelings. I think it clearly indicates low-assertiveness, and in my judgement, your reaction to the standard conflict situation was just another example of that since you gave up the test when most people did not. "Well, I've got to run. A research assistant will be in soon to give you the personality measures as well as a form for you to describe your reactions to this experiment." Stand, extend hand, shake hands, and say, "Thanks again, (Name), for coming today and helping us out. I really appreciate it." Depart.

Following the interview, a member of a research team entered the room and administered a set of instruments in a standard order (measures described below). When the student had completed the forms, the interviewer re-entered the room and de-briefed the student of the purposes of the study. After the de-brief, the student was scheduled for a 20-minute period one week later. The purpose of the re-test was to explore the effectiveness of the de-briefing in returning the student to his pre-experiment state, and will not be dealt with further in this report.

Measures

The main dependent measure was change in self-ratings of assertiveness. The first administration of the assertiveness rating was accomplished by embedding it in the intellectual efficiency instrument administered by the confederate in the incident. The scale asked students to rate their assertiveness compared to other college men from "very much less" to "very much more" in nine stanine steps. The scale was anchored by descriptions of individuals at the upper and lower levels of the trait. Assertiveness was described as "the ability to confidently assert one's feelings and rights in social situations. High scores are forceful, frank and verbally fluent. They are able to maintain their rights without unnecessarily hurting others. Low scores are hesitant, uneasy, unassuming in social situations. They are agreeable with others even if they have to compromise their needs and rights to do so." A post-interview rating of assertiveness was obtained by embedding the same scale in a personality rating form containing 10 trait-rating scales, which were Good Impression, Defensiveness, Complexity, Fear of Failure, Assertiveness, Emotionality, Self-Acceptance, Dependency, Persistence, Impulse Expression and Need for Achievement. In addition, all subjects were given an open-ended Incident Analysis form containing the following three questions: "When the secretary demanded my test I..."

"I reacted this way because..." "My reaction to the situation suggests that I am ..." Two instruments were administered which were designed to measure factors related to assertive behavior: the Interpersonal Importance Inventory, a measure of attitudes towards expressing feelings; and, the Discomfort Inventory, a measure of perceived anxiety in interpersonal situations. Both measures were developed on the basis of discrimination between individuals improving in assertive behavior therapy and those not improving (Roszell, 1972). On the Interpersonal Importance Inventory, students reacted to each of the 25 statements by indicating their agreement with the statement on a 5-step scale from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". Students reacted to the 20 items on the Discomfort Inventory by indicating their degree of discomfort with the situation described in each of the statements on a 5-point scale from "no discomfort" to "a great deal of discomfort". Finally, and Interview Reaction form for evaluating the quality of the interview was administered. Students reacted to each of the 30 items by indicating whether the statement was true or false.

The assertiveness ratings were converted into a change score by subtracting the post-interview rating of assertiveness from the pre-interview rating of assertiveness. Responses to the open-ended statement "My reaction to the situation suggests that I am...." on the Incident Analysis Form provided a means to evaluate the students' subjective reactions to the experiment. Students' responses were classified into two categories: (1) unassertive, submissive or avoidant of conflict; and (2) "normal", or able to make a rational analysis of the situation. Two raters independently assigned responses to one of the two categories with only one disagreement between them.

RESULTS

Normative Information and Inference Analysis

Means on the assertiveness stanine ratings for the 48 students in the "average non-specific", "deviant-non-specific", "average low-assertive", and "deviant low-assertive" conditions were 5.48 on the before-interview ratings and 4.69 on the after-interview ratings, and standard deviations were 1.38 and 1.36 respectively. Assertiveness ratings change score means and standard deviations are presented by treatment condition in Table 1. For both inter-

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Insert Table 1 Here

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viewers, the mean changes for the "low assertive" conditions (means range from 1.00 to 2.00) are larger than the "non-specific" conditions (means range from -.17 to .50). Means for the "deviant" conditions are not greatly different from those for the comparable "average" conditions. For interviewer B the greatest change was achieved in the "deviant low assertive" condition ($\bar{X}$ = 2.00 compared to $\bar{X}$ = 1.17 for the"average low assertive" condition), for interviewer A the change obtained in the "average low assertive" condition is the largest ($\bar{X}$ = 1.17 versus a mean change of 1.00 for the "deviant low assertive" condition). A three-way analysis of variance of differences among assertive change scores by normative information, inference, and interviewer, resulted in a significant difference for the inference variable ($p = .002$). None of the differences for normative information, interviewers, or interaction effects approached statistical significance.

Table 2 displays the tallies for the"unassertive" versus "other" explanations students gave to the question "My reaction in the situation suggests that I am..." for the five treatment conditions. None of the students receiving the "non-specific" conditions responded by indicating low assertiveness.

Insert Table 2 Here

Five of the twelve students in the "average low-assertive" condition, seven of the twelve in the "deviant low-assertive" condition and nine of the twelve in the "deviant low-assertive guided review" condition indicated low assertiveness in their responses. Chi-square analysis yielded non-significant statistics for interviewer and normative information differences, and a chi-square of 16, significant at the $p \leq .001$ level, for the inference difference.

In a three-way analysis of variance of differences among treatment conditions on the 54 items of the Interpersonal Importance Inventory, the Discomfort Inventory and the nine personality trait ratings, 15 differences were found to be statistically significant ($p \leq .05$). Three items reflect significant differences between the "deviant" and "average" conditions. Students in the deviant conditions as compared to students in the average conditions disagreed more with the statement "I dislike doing things on the spur of the moment," indicated less discomfort at "giving opinions about which I am not sure," and indicated more discomfort at "asking employers for a job". Three items relfected significant differences between students in the "non-specific" and "low-assertive" conditions. Students in the "low-assertive" conditions, as compared with students in the "non-specific" conditions rated themselves as having higher fear of failure compared to other college men, more discomfort at giving opinions "about which I am not sure" and agreed more with the statement "I dislike doing things on the spur of the moment". A significant interaction effect between the normative and inference variables occurred on ratings of impulse expression. Of students in the "deviant" conditions, those in the "non-specific" conditions rated themselves higher on impulse expression ($\bar{X} = 5.42$) than did students in the "low-assertive" conditions ($\bar{X} = 3.83$), with the opposite pattern in the "average" norm conditions (average non-specific conditions $\bar{X} = 3.75$, average low-assertive conditions $\bar{X} = 4.08$).

Statistically significant differences between interviewers were found on three items. Students interviewed by A as compared to students interviewed by B disagreed more with the statement "Contradicting a domineering person doesn't pay since you will just make him angry anyway" and disagreed less with the statement "One is better off solving his own problems rather than asking for help from a stranger". One interviewer by normative information interaction was significant - students interviewed by A in the average condition agreed more with the statement "Giving in to other peoples' demands indicates low assertiveness" than students in the deviant condition, with the opposite pattern for interviewer B. Five items had statistically significant three-way interactions: self-acceptance and emotionality ratings and three Discomfort Inventory items ("dealing with bossy people", "taking sexual initiative", and "asking an employer for a job").

A chi-square analysis of the 30 interview reaction items yielded four statistically significant differences ($p \leq .05$). Students receiving the low-assertive conditions versus those in the non-specific conditions more often endorsed as true the statements "the interviewer seemed opinionated" and "the interviewer seemed to be trying to change my beliefs about myself", and they less often indicated that "I have talked to a counselor or psychologist in my life". Students also more often said of interviewer A than of interviewer B "the interviewer seemed opinionated".

Review of Past Experiences Analysis

Means of the 12 students in the "deviant low-assertive guided review" conditions on the pre-interview and post-interview assertiveness ratings were 6.33 and 4.25 and the standard deviations were 1.04 and 1.16 respectively. The change score means and standard deviations for the "deviant, low-assertive, guided review" conditions and the "deviant low-assertive, non-guided review" conditions are presented in Table 3. For both interviewers, the change scores

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Insert Table 3 Here

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in the guided review condition were larger than those for the non-guided review condition (means changes were 1.67 and 2.50 for the guided review conditions, and 1.00 and 2.00 for the non-guided history conditions for interviewers A and B respectively). As is evident, interviewer B's mean changes were larger in both conditions than were interviewer A's. A two-way analysis of variance by guided versus non-guided review and inerviewers yielded no statistically significant differences, the closest being the difference between interviewers ($p = .12$). More students gave a non-assertive explanation for their reactions to the incident in the guided review condition ($N = 9$) than in the non-guided review condition ($N = 7$) but the difference was not statistically significant.

Using two-way analysis of variance, nine differences between conditions were found to be statistically significant on the 54 items of the Interpersonal Importance Inventory, the Discomfort Inventory and the nine rating scales. Five of the items reflected differences between guided review and non-guided review conditions and four reflected interaction effects between interviewers and the review variable. All of the items differentiating the guided and non-guided review conditions reflected more low-assertiveness self-ratings for the students in the guided review condition. Students in the guided review conditions, compared to the students in the non-guided review conditions rated their discomfort as greater at "disappointing close friends", "expressing my own opinion in a discussion group" and "making a bad impression", they agreed more than "contradicting a domineering person doesn't pay since you will just make him angry" and rated themselves as making less of a good impression on others. On items reflecting an interaction between the review variable and interviewers, students in the guided review condition who were interviewed by A as opposed to those interviewed by B indicated greater discomfort at "asking an employer for a job" and agreed more that "I have often not expressed my opinion or stood up for my rights when I wanted to do so"; they also rated

themselves as demonstrating more "emotionality" and less "self acceptance". In the non-guided review condition the interviewers achieved opposite effects on these items. There were no significant differences between interviewers or review conditions on items from the Interview Reaction items.

DISCUSSION

Hypothesis one states that greater acceptance of an inferred personal characteristic will occur when the inference is based on atypical action than when the inference is based on typical action. The results are contrary to this hypothesis. Interviewees accepted the inference of low assertiveness whenever it was suggested regardless of whether actions were presented as deviant or average. One possible explanation of this result stems from the strong emphasis in the "low-assertive" conditions on the existence of alternative actions in the target situation and the undesirability of the action taken by the student. Informing the interviewee that others performed desirable alternative actions may have been simply another way of telling him that he could have performed alternatives also. The perception of deviancy may have been redundant with the perception of possible alternatives, and thus did not add to the case for the interviewer's inference. Self-perception may be based more on personal standards of performance than on normative standards.

A second possible explanation for these results is prestige suggestion. This study may have simply replicated the finding that attractive, expert interviewers can produce short term changes in interviewee's self-perceptions by expressing an opinion discrepant from the individual's original view. The interviewer's highly structured reasoning may have had little or nothing to do with the influence observed in the "low-assertive" conditions. Further research is needed to separate the effects of an interviewer's statement of opinion from the effects of his stated rationale for that opinion.

The "deviant" condition alone seems to have led students to attribute their action to impulsiveness in that the two items reflecting the effects of the normative information conditions,"doing things on the spur of the moment" and "giving opinions I'm not sure of", suggest impulsiveness. Further, the interaction of normative information and inference variables on "impulse expression" ratings indicates that students who received the deviant condition attributed their actions to impulsiveness when they did not receive the low assertiveness label, but to low-assertiveness when they did.

Contrary to hypothesis two, changes in self-ratings and the number of persons reporting "low assertiveness" to account for their action were not significantly greater with the guided review than with the non-guided review. Yet there were small increases in both change scores and reports, and four of the assertive behavior items reflected significant differences due to the guided review. These results suggest that the guided review may have extended and deepened the perception of low assertiveness. Observation of the robustness of the change over time would have been a more precise test of the effects of the guided review. However, because the inference of low-assertiveness might have been distressing to students, they were de-briefed immediately after completing the tests following the interview. With a beneficial target trait, it might be acceptable to allow a longer period to elapse before de-briefing.

The study has a number of methodological weaknesses. First, subjects were not assigned to conditions in a rigorously random fashion. The thrust of subject assignment was to balance the treatment conditions in terms of pre-ratings on the target variable. The problem of random assignment into several conditions with few subjects in each condition remains unsolved. Secondly, the two treatment conditions which were taken as the "average" conditions were in fact dissimilar. In the "average non-specific" conditions no mention was

made of how others did, while in the "average low-assertive" conditions it was stated that all but 2 out of 40 students "reacted as you did". In both the deviant and the low-assertive conditions, alternative actions and their possible effects were presented. The statements in the low-assertive condition rather more expressed the interviewer's views or interpretation than enumerated alternatives. The three elements of normative information, alternative analysis and overt inference should be more clearly differentiated.

We feel that the "incidental event" procedure utilized in this study holds promise for both interview research and actual practice. For research purposes, the procedure of inducing and analyzing an overt target behavior offers a relatively high degree of control over the interviewee's immediate personal experience, as well as a clear structure for the interview. In practice, the technique may have considerable therapeutic value. Beck (1974) has reported cases in which depressed patients were helped by first inducing them to emit a behavior which was inconsistent with their self-concepts, and then pointing out the implications of that behavior for their self-views. Beck has hypothesized that part of the depressive syndrome for many patients is an unrealistically negative view of their abilities. His treatment for this problem in self-perception is to have the therapist induce the patient to undertake a task on which success is assured. The therapist then points out how the successful behavior is inconsistent with the individual's negative view of his abilities.

The strong persuasive effect of using an induced behavior to support an interviewer's conclusion has been demonstrated in the present study by the finding that none of the 12 students in the "average non-specific" condition attributed their action to low assertiveness, while 9 of 12 students did so in the "deviant low-assertive, guided review" condition. It would appear that the approach of inducing and analyzing concrete behavior is a potentially powerful method for changing client self-perception but that the persuasive instruction which led to our use of this technique needs considerable revision.

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Table 1

Means and standard deviations of assertiveness ratings change scores by inference, normative information, and interviewer cells.

Normative Information	Inference							
	non-specific				low assertive			
	Interviewer A		Interviewer B		Interviewer A		Interviewer B	
	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	$\bar{X}$	S.D.
average	.33	.94	.50	.50	1.17	1.76	1.17	.89
deviant	-.17	.37	.33	.46	1.00	1.00	2.00	1.52

Table 2

Frequency of "unassertive" and "other" explanations given for reactions to the incidental event, by treatment condition.

Condition	Category	
	Unassertive	Other
average-non specific-nonguided review	0	12
deviant-non specific-nonguided review	0	12
average-low assertive-nonguided review	5	7
deviant-low assertive-nonguided review	7	5
deviant-low assertive-guided review	9	3

Table 3

Means and standard deviations of assertiveness ratings change scores by guided and nonguided review, and interviewers.

Interviewer	Review			
	Guided		Nonguided	
	$\bar{X}$	S. D.	$\bar{X}$	S.D.
A	1.67	1.22	1.00	1.00
B	2.50	1.38	2.00	1.52